

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Jamie L Whitten Building  
1400 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

A year ago, Under Secretary Mark Rey informed Congress that the U.S. Forest Service was working on a "long-term plan" regarding the safety and availability of the air tanker fleet that can be used for firefighting.

Now, the forest fire season is again upon us and again we have seen a fatal crash of an airplane engaged in responding to a fire – in this case, killing a pilot working under a contract with the Department of Defense.

This prompts us to inquire about the status of the promised air tanker plan and the overall readiness of the Forest Service to respond to the fires that can be expected this year. In particular, we would appreciate responses to the following questions:

Is the plan finished? If so, what is it, and how is it being implemented?

If the plan is not finished, what has delayed its completion? When will it be completed, and how is the Forest Service addressing air support safety issues until the plan is in place and operational?

A prompt reply to these inquiries would be appreciated.

Sincerely,



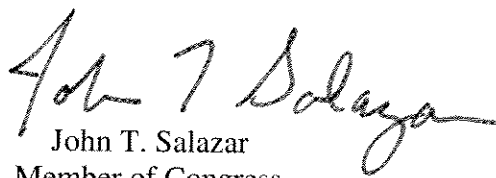
Mark Udall  
Member of Congress



Nick J. Rahall II  
Chairman, Committee  
On Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives



Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



John T. Salazar  
Member of Congress